

SELLING PERFORMANCE FABRICS WITH CONFIDENCE

BY ERIN BERG

Performance Fabrics Unfold and Take Hold

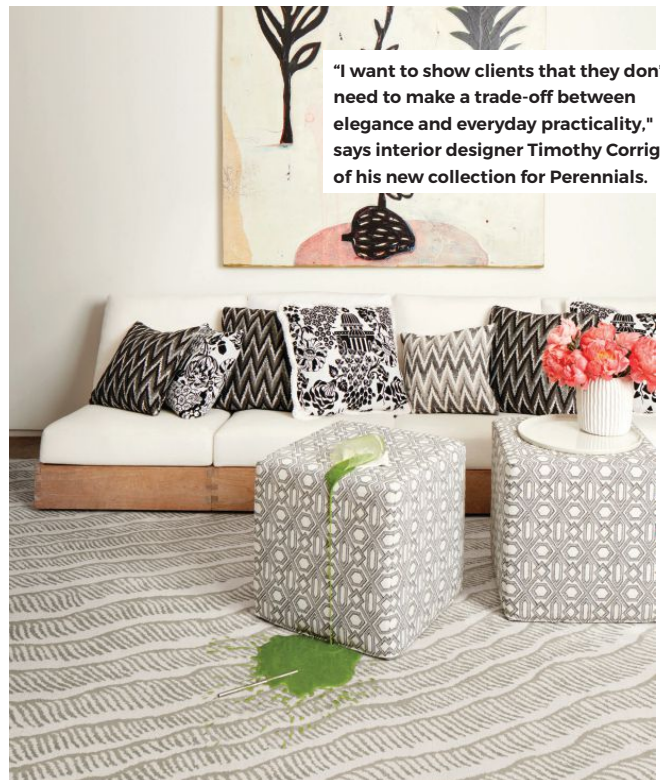
Today, people live on and with their furniture, demanding performance and function along with great style. Performance fabrics are designed specifically for durability and cleanability in environments with high use, risk of stains and soils, or exposure to exterior climate conditions.

Long used in commercial and hospitality settings, performance fabrics are growing in residential use as more people are becoming aware of the long-lasting and easy-to-clean benefits that make them well-suited for the modern lifestyle.

"The performance fabric category is seeing a 'residential' blend," says LeAnne Flack, Marketing Manager of South Carolina-based Milliken Specialty Interiors, producer of the Breathe performance fabric brand. "Residential upholstery fabrics are demanding physical performance that is approaching commercial-grade performance, while the design aesthetics of residential upholstery are influencing the commercial applications.

"A few years ago, consumers didn't know what performance fabrics meant but they are savvier now," says Gloria Tsocos, Design Manager for Outdura, a Hudson, NC-based producer of 100 percent solution-dyed acrylic fabrics for indoor and outdoor casual furniture. "The aesthetics have evolved, allowing us to do more, such as create beautiful designs with novelty yarns that offer performance and a soft, lofty hand." ✦

"THE DESIGN AESTHETIC AND TECHNOLOGY HAVE EVOLVED AND MADE THE PERFORMANCE FABRIC STORY STRONGER BECAUSE WE ARE ABLE TO CREATE MORE OPTIONS."
— Gloria Tsocos, Outdura



SOFA & UTENSILS: PREMIUMDESIGNER; SHOWER: TETTYGREEN; WEATHER: NADIJA - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Home Hot Spots for Performance Fabrics



FAMILY AND ENTERTAINMENT AREAS

If you have young children, pets or entertain frequently, your home and lifestyle demand more durable and easily cleanable fabrics.



DINING AND KITCHEN AREAS

These are the most likely places in the home where spills and splatters can and will happen.



OUTDOOR

Whether under a covered patio or direct exposure to exterior elements, there are performance fabrics designed to repel water, resist fading and mildew, and deliver better cleanability.



MUDROOM OR BATHROOM

These areas are often overlooked but definitely get heavy use, so it's worth considering a performance fabric for an upholstered mudroom bench or chair at the bathroom vanity.

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE BASE

Matching Use and Type

A great starter question when guiding customers to the right performance fabric is: How will the fabric be used — indoor or outdoor, on a sofa in sunny spot in the living room or on dining chairs? The answer will provide a roadmap for which types of performance fabric to consider.

"It's important to understand there are different types of performance fabrics for different uses," says Elise Gabrielson, Marketing Director for Crypton, which launched its residential division about seven years ago after more than 25 years in the hospitality and health care markets. "Education is so important, and we have dedicated outreach directors to help our partners understand the properties of the fabric, what they can expect and how to clean it."



CLEANABILITY

It's important for retailers to manage expectations, advises Christy Almond, Vice President of Product Development and Marketing for North Carolina-based Valdese Weavers, which launched

the InsideOut performance fabric brand in 2017 for indoor and outdoor use. "Not all products are created equal ... and stains are not created equal," she adds.

Different cleaning may be recommended depending on the type of stain or soil, as well as the type of performance fabric. While all performance fabrics market cleanability with simple water and soap solution, only certain brands are bleach cleanable. In terms of stain types, oil-based stains such as those from cooking oils, salad dressing and body lotions may have slightly different cleaning recommendations than ketchup, wine or dirt stains.

DURABILITY

Defined as the ability to withstand wear and tear, durability is tested and rated for abrasion and pilling. In North America, the Wyzenbeek test method is primarily used, while the Martindale method is considered the international standard.



The Wyzenbeek test abrades the fabric back and forth against another piece of fabric, known as the double-rub test. The standard for residential use is 15,000 double-rubs, and performance fabrics are typically tested to 30,000 double-rubs or higher.

Another aspect of fabric durability is pilling, which occurs when the fibers become loose and ball up from friction. This is typically found with synthetic fibers more than in natural fibers where the release of fibers is in less noticeable "dust" form.

UV OR FADE RESISTANCE

Whether fully exposed to changing climate conditions as outdoor furniture or indoors in a sunny spot, performance fabrics with UV resistance can prolong the life of the fabric against fading and breakdown. It does not mean that the fabric will never fade or deteriorate, but it will provide some protection from significant fading for the expected lifetime of the furniture.

PFC- OR FLUORINE-FREE

The emerging concerns with perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs), a group of toxic chemicals that includes PFOA and PFOS both used in water-repellant and stain-resistant products, have prompted changes in manufacturing of scores of household products. Several leading performance fabric brands say their products are free of PFC or fluorine.

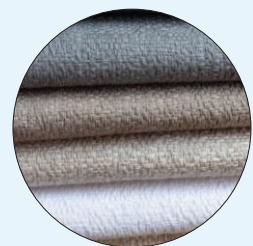


"THIS SEGMENT OF THE MARKET WILL CONTINUE TO EVOLVE AND GROW AS TECHNOLOGY INCREASES AND THE LINES BETWEEN WHAT CONSUMERS EXPECT FROM PERFORMANCE FABRICS AND WHERE THE MARKET IS TODAY WILL CONTINUE TO BLUR."

— Christy Almond,
InsideOut by Valdese

"JUST IN THE LAST TWO YEARS WE HAVE SEEN MANY [COMPANIES] LAUNCHING PERFORMANCE FABRIC LINES ... AND IT IS STILL REALLY EARLY [IN THE CATEGORY] SO WE EXPECT TO SEE CHANGE IN TECHNOLOGIES AND OTHER AREAS."

— Elise Gabrielson,
Crypton Home



"CLEARER STANDARDS AND DEFINING PERFORMANCE FABRICS [FOR RESIDENTIAL] ARE NEEDED, AND WE BELIEVE THAT IS CHANGE THAT IS COMING."

— Ron Swindle,
Development Manager,
Breathe by Milliken Specialty Interiors